



INFORMATION SHEET

Parent Information Network



Transition Point 5: Junior High/Middle School to High School

Transition: The Next Step

Transition is movement or change without interruption. It should be a smooth flow from one place or condition to another. While the transition plan for a student receiving special education services is designed to prepare him for life after high school, transition can start when a child enters preschool. The fifth of six distinct stages of transition is junior high/middle school to high school.

Factors of Change

The transition from junior high/middle school to high school may involve going to a much larger school. There is also a change from the teaming arrangement that we often see in today's middle schools to a high school structure. Each middle school "team or family" has the same students for each of the core classes. This model provides stability for the students and helps transition them from a class with one teacher to having multiple classes and teachers. Parents need to be aware of the anxiety of moving to a larger campus and take "field trips" to the high school to help new students learn the campus. Concerns are felt all over again by the freshman student on how to: go from one class to another; access lockers; dress for P.E.; access the lunch line; and catch the right school bus. Freshmen could take a special interest summer school class that would help them learn the campus, meet the teachers, and help students look forward to the new school year. Other transition issues may need to be addressed on the student's IEP (Individual Education Program).

The 'buddy system' pairs new students with a more experienced student. The older student acts as a resource person and friend to the new student. These connections may help students establish friendships. Parents need to know how to reach staff members assigned to new students or how to ask to have someone assigned to ease the transition.

The student should be included in the IEP process to develop a meaningful transition plan. Does he have a

desire to continue his education after high school or seek employment? Will she go on to a technical school, a junior college, or a university? Will classes taken in high school meet entrance requirements?

Education after high school is not for everyone. Parents need to help their student identify skills that can be used in the workplace. Based on the student's interests, employment in his interest area should be explored. Is he punctual? Will he be able to live alone? Is a group home or supervision more appropriate?

Sometimes parents need to help their child adjust career goals to be more realistic. Computer technicians, for example, need excellent visual-motor skills, but not necessarily endurance. Could he make a living doing this? Use the student's strengths to help find a career path or determine options for volunteering, etc.

Ages and Stages

Most students beginning high school are 14 years old. Peers become very important to each student. Social skills and making appropriate choices may need to be included in the IEP to build safe relationships.

Making the Transition Smoother

The parent has a very important role to play in the transition planning and education of the high school student. Parents need to be both an advocate and collaborator. Communication is often strained between parents and teens, but keeping a dialogue is important. Talk about the plans your child has made. Help him explore vocations and careers.

It is important for the parent to be an active listener. Parents need to help their child explore decisions. Direct him to other people who can share insight or expertise.

The high school IEP will now address life after high school. IDEA, the federal special education law, requires that transition services be tailored to fit the individual needs of the student. The vocational classes in high school could lead to more training after graduation, or it could become a job. Vocational programs in the automotive industry are very popular in school. Many students begin working at car dealerships as mechanics following high school graduation. Other students begin supported employment during school and then transition to independent living within a community based program after graduation.

The following are just a few examples of transition service needs that should be considered with the staff: need for career/vocational aptitudes testing; need for teachers from the junior high/middle school and high school to talk with one another, and share records and expectations. Ideally, a representative from the high school will attend the feeder elementary/middle school's final IEP meeting for the transition planning. Provision for any peer tutors, aides, vocational education staff, or others who are to fill a transition guidance role need to be included on the IEP.

Adolescents will try their wings, not always waiting for their parents' approval. The parents' role cannot be underestimated in helping to make this transition a success for the student. The ultimate goal of transition is to help a student establish a healthy lifestyle and succeed in the general curriculum and life after high school.

References

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- Next Step Development Team. (2002) *Taking the next steps-a guide to help students with disabilities transition from secondary to postsecondary education*. Phoenix, AZ: Arizona Department of Education.
- Wehman, Paul, Ph.D. (2001). *Life beyond the classroom: Transition strategies for young people with disabilities*. Baltimore, MD: Brookes Publishing Company.
- Wehman, Paul, Ph. D. (2002). *Individual transition plans: The teacher's curriculum guide for helping youth with special needs*. Pro-Ed, Incorporated.
- Organizations/Web Sites**
- Learning Disability Association of Arizona, 13106 W. Limewood, Sun City West, AZ 85375, 623-975-4551, www.ldanatl.org
- National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (NICHCY), P.O. Box 1492, Washington, D.C. 20013, 800-695-0285 www.nichcy.org
- Pacer Center, 8161 Normandale Blvd, Minneapolis, MN 55437, 952-838-9000, www.pacer.org
- Parent Information Network, Arizona Department of Education, Exceptional Student Services, 1535 W. Jefferson, Phoenix, AZ 85007, 602-542-3852, 800-352-4558 www.ade.az.gov/ess/pinspals
- Transition Services, Arizona Department of Education, Exceptional Student Services 1535 W. Jefferson, Phoenix, AZ 85007, 602-364-4026, 800-352-4558 www.ade.az.gov/ess/transitionservices

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